



**Adherence and critique
of cinema in *The glass
menagerie's* dramaturgy**
*Adesão e crítica ao
cinema na dramaturgia de
The glass menagerie*



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Abstract: this article analyzes Tennessee Williams's *The glass menagerie* (1944), taking aspects of criticism and adherence that the dramaturgical text develops to the classical American cinema of the 1930s and 1940s. I utilize an intermedial approach to advocate for a "critical adherence" to the language and social culture of the period's cinema in *The glass menagerie*, which puts in check the dramatic aspect of Williams's text. This article conducts a preliminary investigation into the possible intermedial relationship between Tennessee Williams' theatrical works and Hollywood cinema.

Keywords: *The glass menagerie*; Tennessee Williams; intermedial; modern theater; classical cinema.

Resumo: o presente artigo analisa a dramaturgia da peça *The glass menagerie* (1944), de Tennessee Williams, tomando aspectos de aderência e crítica que o texto desenvolve em relação ao cinema clássico estadunidense dos anos 1930 e 1940. Por meio de uma abordagem intermediária, advogarei a favor de uma "adesão-crítica" de *The glass menagerie* à linguagem e à cultura social do cinema do período, capaz de promover tensionamentos no caráter dramático do texto de Williams. O trabalho almeja um apontamento preliminar a respeito das trocas intermediárias entre os textos teatrais de Tennessee Williams e o cinema hollywoodiano.

Palavras-chave: *The glass menagerie*; Tennessee Williams; intermedialidade; teatro moderno; cinema clássico. A possible intermedial approach: gender and media

A possible intermedial approach: gender and media

This article aims at a preliminary note regarding the possible intermedial relationship between Tennessee Williams' theatrical works and Hollywood cinema. To this end, a punctual analysis of the play *The glass menagerie* (1944) will be carried out, considering aspects of adherence and of criticism that the dramaturgical text develops regarding classic American cinema from the 1930s and 1940s. Considering the play a modern drama – as proposed by Peter Szondi (2001) –, derived from a cinematic script written for a major film industry – MGM –, I will advocate in favor of a “critical-adhesion” of *The glass menagerie* to the language and social culture of the period's cinema, capable of putting in check the dramatic aspect of Tennessee Williams's dramaturgical text.

Following the perspective of intermedial studies, I defend the idea that the relationship between media can be an access method to understand ruptures within the aesthetic and discursive pattern of a work or set of works. In this case, in addition to the text-film relationship, one can consider theater and cinema as interchangeable media, since arts that also communicate through their signs are defined as media (DINIZ, 2018). Using Jacques Rancière's (2010) concept of *dissent*, Lucia Nagib (2014) emphasizes that the intermedial exchange can generate elements that differ from the aesthetic regime and the hegemonic discourse of an artistic work in a given historical period. According to the author, by the study of intermedial relations, one can discover a set of procedures that seek to solve a *crisis* in artistic creation and that indicate a political moment in the work (NAGIB, 2014, p. 22).

The hypothesis of this article is that the intermedial relationship with cinema, in this text by Tennessee Williams, stresses the cohesion, structure, and discourse of the ideal drama. When we think about a concept as wide as that of drama, we are in dialogue with two notions: the historical and the generic one. The first concerns what was established as the European tradition of drama, as prescribed by Denis Diderot in the 18th century in his “Discourse on dramatic poetry” and resumed in perspective by Peter Szondi in his studies on bourgeois drama and the modern drama. The drama is the result of modernity and the Enlightenment precepts regarding progress and the notion of individualization, under which the dramatic character starts to act, that is, to make decisions in private tragedies².

² Raymond Williams (2002) uses the notion of tragedy and elaborates the concept of “structure of feeling” to approach modern drama in theater and literature. The author uses terms such as “liberal tragedy” and “private tragedy.”

Drama is the location of the particular subject, the discussions in the living room, and the affirmation of the bourgeois man's power of action. Drama is a structure for psychological and sentimental engagement; a tradition that influenced not only modern Western theater, but also cinema, soap operas, and literature, and continues to operate in the most diverse media to this day. The generic notion, "the dramatic" (or the drama genre) is a category always compared to two others: the lyric (or the lyric genre) and the epic (or the epic genre). This elementary division resumes the precepts of Aristotelian poetics, which have been perpetuated until today as the segmentation between what is in the order of poetry and musicality (lyrical), what is in the order of representation of actions in the present (dramatic), and what relates to past story telling (epic).

The generic notion is never disconnected from the historical one, and it is difficult to find plays adhered to drama that are totally "pure," composed of completely closed, round, and causal situations, without any indication of a lyrical, epic, or, in any way, experimental moment that tensions the norm and points to protocol divergences that will eventually intensify in melodramatic expedients. Thus, I believe that developing moments of *tension* or *rupture* in the still dominant discourse and aesthetics of the drama is a productive activity.

Simultaneously with the development of drama in the history of theater, distinct movements flourished, such as the theatrical avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s, and popular scenic experiences, such as fair, street, pantomime, and circus theater, among others. The same occurs with cinema in terms of the development of its classic, industrial, and hegemonic language and the parallel and definitely striking avant-garde experiences, realisms, experimentalism, etc. And although it is naive to think of an "overcoming" of this category still underway in the representative arts, sets of experiences have been elaborated to deliberate break with drama (that is, that dialogue directly with it), such as postdramatic theater³ and the most emblematic modern experience in this sense: the Brechtian epic theater.

Historical landmark, Brecht's epic theater promotes a set of procedures that deliberately break with dramatic assumptions, such as the use of narration, evocation of collective themes and subjects, reflective awareness of the characters and actors on stage, among others. The mentioned resources generate this type of "detachment" from the flow of the dramatic spring or, as they say, the famous "distancing" (which,

³ See Lehmann (2007). In cinema, in turn, it is possible to relate the assumptions of a "postmodern" cinema with the paradigm of the "postdramatic."

however, is not opposed to an emotional engagement of the audience). Some procedures of *The glass menagerie* can be related to the Brechtian current, as pointed out by Greta Heintzelman and Alycia Smith-Howard (2005). However, when we talk, in the analysis of the aforementioned play, about “epic procedures,” we want to go beyond the immediate reference to the epic theater and think about moments in which dramatic fate is distorted by the influence of structures, subjects, and themes from other media : the cinema⁴ – especially what has been called classic language cinema⁵. In this sense, and following the idea of theatrical modernity proposed by Szondi, cinema would tension the drama in this Williams’s piece, as devices such as flashback, editing, voice over, the use of plans and frames, temporal ellipses, etc.,⁶ invade the “here and now” structure of the dialogical drama and make it more narrative, more epic⁷.

Films that were perpetuated under the banner of “classical cinema” stress the “roundness” of modern theatrical drama not because of a deliberate disposition to reflect – such as epic theater works – but rather because of the intrinsic characteristics of their own media; at the same time, dramatic theater also modernizes the language of cinema due to characteristics inherent to its media (for example, the influence of the continuous action of the dramatic scene in the use of cinematic plan sequence). This all leads us to the notion that the interchange between the media, as Nagib suggests evoking a Rancière’s political-philosophical concept, is one of the key points for their transformation. And, faced with a modern dilemma of causality, in the “egg or chicken” style, the idea of historical and independent progression between media

⁴ Although this is not the focus of the article, it is worth mentioning the influence of cinema in Brecht’s epic theater, since the playwright became interested in the aesthetic and political potential of cinema (RAMOS, 2006). On the other hand, as is well known, the epic theater and the procedures of detachment and reflexivity employed by Brecht will be a major influence in many of the films and currents related to new cinemas – inserted in what is known as “modern cinema” – from the mid 1940s.

⁵ Linked to the prevailing notion of the institutional mode of representation, in which a narrative film is decomposed into sequences, scenes, and plans conditioned to transitions, ellipses, and framing, being deeply related to an emotional and psychological aspect of the characters or to the logical and causal triggering of actions. It is the predominant language in an industrial cinema. Its founding structures emerge in films from the 1910s under the Griffithian paradigm. See Xavier (2005) and Martin (2003).

⁶ Cinema, even the most Hollywoodian one and inserted in the cultural industry, unlike theater, works with epic resources since its beginnings: jumps in time, editing, reflective digressions by voice over, in short, a series of procedures that belong, for example, more to the literary novel – whose segmentation in chapters and omniscient narration may refer to the idea of comings and goings in time and the character’s internality/psychology – than to theatrical drama, in which space-time unity is prerogative.

⁷ Even though such devices are general elements of a certain “modern conscience,” present in the general imagination and revealed in other media and processes even before the cinematographic device emerged. See Schwartz (2004).

and artistic languages is increasingly questionable. That is why they take the effort, once again, as Nagib proposes, to seek the modern moment within the classic and vice versa.

The frustration of the ideal drama in Tennessee Williams

There is no doubt that Tennessee Williams was one of the most popular and productive authors in modern American theater. However, in addition to theatrical dramaturgy, Williams developed a close link both with other forms of literature – having written a robust set of short stories, poems, essays, novels, and memoirs – and with cinema – becoming a screenwriter for some adaptations of his plays, besides bearing the title of English-language theatrical author more adapted to the screens after Shakespeare⁸. His influence in Hollywood is capital. Most of his long plays have at least one film adaptation, and in some cases, as *The rose tattoo* (Daniel Mann, 1955) and *Baby doll* (Elia Kazan, 1956), the script was written by Williams himself.

There are many access routes for analyzing this author's wide and diverse production. The psychology of the characters, the symbolism and lyricism of his texts, the relationship with tragedy, the representation of figures from the South of the USA, in addition to the link with biographical events, are the traditional front doors to the work of Tennessee Williams⁹. I would like to propose an intermedial approach that considers the relationship of Williams's texts with other artistic manifestations, more specifically with cinema. Tennessee Williams is an intermedial author par excellence: a large part of his work results from the transposition of his plots and characters into different formats, not without considerable changes in the course.

Williams's link to cinema predates his first work adapted for the screen: before he emerged in theater, Williams had a series of jobs, including movie theater usher and screenwriter at MGM studios. It is possible to notice references to cinema in several of his dramaturgical texts: mentions of actors and actresses of the Hollywood star system, use of projection with subtitles in scenes, transitions and cuts that resemble film transitions and cuts, characters that go to movie theaters, or even a one-act play – *These are the stairs you got to watch* (1941) – that takes place in the hall of a decadent movie palace, with constant interference from the audio and light from the film that is diegetically projected into the room.

⁸ See Sala (1991).

⁹ See, for example, Gassner (1965), Betti (2013), and the considerations on the subject made by Costa (2001).

Still, with the popularity of texts that were successful on both Broadway and Hollywood, such as *A streetcar named desire* (1947) or *Cat on a hot tin roof* (1955), much of the traditional American theatrical criticism of the time clung to supposed aspects of “failures” of the author, especially when he – in his extensive production – did not “achieve” the forms of the dominant drama in the period. For example, John Gassner, a fundamental historian of North American theater and a former professor of Williams, at the same time that he singles out the author – in stating that young Williams “leaned [...] towards a fusion of naturalistic details, with a symbolism and poetic sensitivity rare in American theatrical compositions” (GASSNER, 1965, p. 115), spares no criticism regarding the recurrent “mistakes” of the former student, connected to a type of “escape” from the genuinely theatrical aspect, that is, the dramatic, and a supposed exceeding taste for “literature, melodrama and *forced theatricality*” (GASSNER, 1965, p. 129).

According to Iná Camargo Costa (2001, p. 134-135), “it is difficult to understand why he [Tennessee Williams] does not write dramas.” His stories do not always have a climax, resolution, or moralizing perspective. Thus, his characters have layers that escape direct Manichaeism, speak with an unusual colloquialism for the time, and reveal a decadent, if not decrepit, American dream. With high doses of lyricism and irony (BETTI, 2013), Tennessee Williams’s theater dramaturgy delivers a series of social figures in strong subjective dives. The nostalgic and poetic tone of his lines does not always take the drama forward, nor always drive the “dramatic spring.”

In this sense, there are a series of Tennessee Williams texts that are distant from the conventions, which still causes bewilderment in an audience that, knowing the adaptations of Williams by Hollywood, expects a “perfectly dramatic” author. This expectation has fueled psychologizing analyses, which take his characters as highly complex beings, as if detached from the textual structure and the context of social forces in which they are inserted, as if larger than the dramatic structure – which “justifies” the “lack of drama” at times. Iná Camargo Costa (2001) takes a critical stand concerning the American tradition – and especially Gassner’s view – defending the possibility of new points of view on Williams’s dramaturgy; a new perspective that does not take the texts as *attempts* to achieve the perfect dramatic form. For Costa (2001, p. 132), Tennessee’s work “does not obey the conventional standard, which, however, continues to guide theater critics and historians”. Not that Williams wanted to “break the rules,” on the contrary. His biography shows that he had a genuine desire to please audiences and critics (GASSNER, 1965, p. 132), which led him, for example, to declare that all the epic apparatus present in *The glass menagerie*

should be cut, or else that his best play would be *Cat on a hot tin roof* (1955), since it was the text in which he saw the problems of the drama as best solved after the “failure” of a play with more experimental characteristics such as *Camino real* (1953).

Perhaps the anguished search for a “perfect drama,” as well as the pressures of American critics (in which the box office definitely contributes to the relevance of the work), has, contradictorily, led Williams to produce unforeseen tensions and ruptures in his texts. And therein lies the highly contradictory nature of some of his works. For example, the element, as suggested by Gassner (1965, p. 129), of a “forced theatricality” of certain characters – which carries an idea of theatrical reflexivity within the play – in plots whose dramatic movement is almost absent¹⁰.

Playwrights from the modern European canon, such as Ibsen and Chekhov, were admittedly influences on Tennessee Williams’s trajectory. The play *Ghosts*, by Henrik Ibsen, is seen as a fundamental moment in Williams’s writing career, which was impacted when he saw the 1934 montage, in which the character Mrs. Alving was played by Alla Nazimova¹¹. There are also many analyses that associate Williams’s characters with those of Chekhov, attached to nostalgic memories and inserted in a paralyzing social context. These comparisons have already been overexploited, as well as the analyses of the development of American theatrical dramaturgy based on the direct influence of the iconic authors from modern European drama. However, would it be possible to find other less “canonical” and Eurocentric influences in Tennessee Williams’s broad work? Such as the authors of American literature and Hollywood films?

Iná Camargo Costa proposes a historical review of North American theatrical dramaturgy. For the author, “internal elements” to the USA should be better studied to understand the modernization of drama in the country, in contrast to traditional studies that link North American theatrical modernity only to the interchange and influence of European theater at the beginning of the 20th century. Following this orientation, I believe that the analysis of Tennessee Williams’s work through the intermediality bias can especially reveal innovative characteristics within his texts. The hypothesis I would like to propose is that the intermedial relationship between text and film was relevant for the modernization of this author’s theatrical dramaturgy, ensuring elements of an epic and experimental character in his language, in addition

¹⁰ Iná Camargo Costa (2001, p. 136), for instance, identifies a whole series of profiles of women “without any drama”.

¹¹ See Heintzelman and Smith-Howard (2005, p. 6).

to making cinema and its culture appear several times as subjects within the theater – thus generating critical reflexivity. I would like to propose an analysis of the play *The glass menagerie* through the bias of the simultaneous relationship of adherence and reflexive criticism to cinema.

The intermedial approach of this study aims to understand a process of tensioning and transformation of languages, as well as providing a basis for understanding the cultural relations between the two media – cinema/film; theater/text – in Williams's work. Thus, this article seeks to carry out an analysis of the play *The glass menagerie* (1944), considering aspects of adherence and of criticism that the play develops regarding the classical North American cinema of the period. This analysis takes place in the perspective of an effort to understand the work of the famous North American playwright through his aesthetic, cultural, and language relationship with other media, highlighting the inadequacy of several of his texts to the precepts of European theater drama and the standards that drive traditional North American criticism.

***The glass menagerie*: the language and culture of cinema on stage**

The glass menagerie was Tennessee Williams's first major hit in theater, which opened in December 1944¹², at the Civic Theater in the city of Chicago. The play was written from a screenplay called *The gentleman caller*, developed by Williams for MGM, a studio with which the author established a six-month contract to write film scripts. However, Williams did not have, at the time, even one script approved and shot by the studio: the six-month contract with MGM was simultaneously a dream come true and a nightmare (HEINTZELMAN; SMITH-HOWARD, 2005, p. 9). The studio refused the script for *The Gentleman Caller*, a work that Williams had worked on "meticulously and to which he was desperately committed" (HEINTZELMAN; SMITH-HOWARD, 2005, p. 9). With explicitly autobiographical content, this script became the basis for the play *The glass menagerie*.

In addition to being written from a never-filmed film script, the dramaturgical text of *The glass menagerie* has other links to the sphere of cinema: first, a formal connection is established with elements of cinematic language, such

¹² The theater of the late 1930s and early 1940s was dominated by literariness in form and naturalism in style, as Gottfried (1970) states. A considerable part of the theatrical production of the period was strongly linked to the dramaturgical text, and the director was a figure to some extent secondary. Important writers of the period, in addition to Williams, were Arthur Miller, William Inge, Elmer Rice, Clifford Odets, Robert E. Sherwood, among others.

as cuts, transitions, suggestion for the use of subtitles and a projector on the scene – aspects of adherence to the formal structures of cinema; second, Williams addresses cultural aspects of the frequency of cinema palaces in the 1930s and establishes relationships with classical genres, such as adventure film and melodrama, in a critical and reflective way. Next, based on these mentioned aspects, we analyze *The glass menagerie*.

Language and cinematographic device on the scene: the adherence

The glass menagerie is a play about memory, narrated distantly by a character-narrator in the future. The story takes place within a huge flashback of a moment of change in the Wingfield family – composed by Tom, his sister Laura, and his mother Amanda –, alternated with interventions from the future and omniscient voice of the protagonist narrator. The play begins with a Tom Wingfield monologue directed to the audience. This epic procedure – a narrator-character who conducts the history-memory and opines about it – refers to a resource already very popular and used in the language of North American cinema of the period, which is the omniscient narrative instance that resumes lived facts by the voice over. In addition to articulating the narrative, Tom is also aware of and dominates the theatrical elements that compose it, such as music and lights – he gestures to the violins to play, for example, or to make the lighting oscillate –, an element that brings the metalinguistic and reflective procedures used by Williams in *The glass menagerie* close to resources related to epic theater, as verified by Heintzelman and Smith-Howard (2005).

Thus, Tom Wingfield releases his narrative capacity on *montage* through “leaps in time”. He says: “To begin with, I turn back time.” (WILLIAMS, 2014, p. 31). In North American theater, this type of temporal management within drama (structure “stuck” in the present) cannot be considered a novelty, since the game with different temporalities, in addition to the alternation of points of view, is presented in reference plays for the understanding of American dramaturgical modernity, such as *On trial* (1814), by Elmer Rice, and *Our town* (1938), by Thornton Wilder. However, unlike today, it was not recurrent for a popular play to move away from the “here and now” of dramatic action. Five years after the premiere of *The glass menagerie*, for example, *the Death of a salesman*, by Arthur Miller, would debut, in which the use of updating memories within the present of the scene would make Peter Szondi (2001) include the author in his seminal study on modern drama, evidently linking the play to the cinematographic language. Such as Szondi when approaching Miller, the notion that the contribution of cinema to theater took place precisely in the articulation of

different temporalities is recurrent. There is also the idea that the flashback expedition intensified on stage after the advent of cinema. Consequently, the “leaps in time” inevitably entail the need for *cutting* between scenes, that is, the montage.

The scenes in *The glass menagerie* are not very long, and the transition indications are reminiscent of the transitions not of the theater (such as black out, or “the curtains that fall”), but of cinema, a possible inheritance of the script of *The gentleman caller*. At the end of each scene, there is an indication of darkening – Williams uses the terms *dim out* and *fade out* numerous times. The darkening ensures a sensation of passage of time between scenes, of time jumps, or ellipses. At the end of the text, Tennessee Williams writes: “the scene dissolves.” This is a term more used to cinematographic scripts than to theatrical dramaturgy since it indicates a transition effect of montage: when one image slowly gives way to another. The cinematographic image is likely to be “dissolved” concretely on the screen, while the theatrical scene is not. This rubric, in addition to the explicit link with cinema, has a lyrical character, or an experimental opening to the scene, since neither the actors nor the scenario would, as in the cinematographic image, dissolve (unless symbolically, for example, by resources such as smoke or translucent curtains).

Another important component that incorporates cinematographic language, in this text by Williams, is the uninterrupted presence of a screen and a projector on the stage, with projections of subtitles and images. This projection device, an evident intermedial medium, is foreseen (written) in the text, and therefore is not an aspect of direction or scenographic choice. Everything that is projected has connection with what is being said by the characters. The images and captions act as comments on the scenes, sometimes anticipating information that will soon be revealed. In some cases this information is redundant, endorsing what is already on the scene, at other times, however, the projections establish an ironic dimension, contradicting the scene. Sometimes the subtitles recall the intertitles of silent cinema films, which, in addition to showing the dialogue, had both the function of narration and commentary. For example, when the projection of the expression *Horror!* is indicated twice, or the expression *Love!*, the implicit sensation of the scene is intensified, not without some melodramatic – and ironic – redundancy. This type of insertion refers directly to the aesthetics of the silent cinema of the 1920s, as in the D. W. Griffith's classics *The birth of a nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916).

The projected images, for the most part, present a past, showing “memories within memory” – since we start from the assumption that what we see on stage is the memory of the narrator-character Tom Wingfield. Thus, on the screen one can

see images of the characters in other times and in other spaces before the scene – flashback lapses within Tom’s great flashback –, as the moments of the supposed youth of his mother, Amanda. In addition, some images add layers of meaning and anticipate elements that will be revealed later, such as when blue roses are projected in a scene of the character Laura Wingfield, the sister, before it was revealed to the public that “blue roses” was her nickname in adolescence, linked to an old passion. All of these insertions do not encourage dramatic actions, being resources that densify reflective or poetic layers of the scene. Through images and texts that are redundant, ironic, or that anticipate facts, the many projections indicated in the text always deviate from the drama.

In the debut montage of *The glass menagerie*, directors Margo Jones and Eddie Dowling decided to remove all this audiovisual apparatus suggested in Williams’s dramaturgy. The author agrees with the choice. Nowadays, with digital technology, projections during a theatrical show are even trivial. However, in the 1940s this was certainly not the rule, even due to the technical difficulty of producing and reproducing these images. What was cut from the textual dramaturgy and removed from its first montage is one of the important points of the play for us to understand the complexity of its less dramatic elements, more focused on an epic and experimental perspective – no wonder the directors did not like the projection, which was an evident element of tension with the drama. The presence of a narrator-character, the great leaps in time, the transitions as in a movie script, and the presence of a screen with projections give this dramaturgical text an epic-cinematic character.

The culture of blindness in the USA: a critical perspective of cinema

In *The glass menagerie*, we follow, from Tom’s point of view, an outline of a crucial period of his acquaintance with his mother Amanda and his sister Laura in the 1930s. Tom works in a shoe store and economically supports his family. Laura has one leg slightly shorter than the other – an issue she has since childhood –, is extremely introverted, and, although pressured by her mother to get married or take a professional typing course, she is unable to establish links with reality, within the scope of social life or work. Her biggest and only occupation is taking care of a tiny glass zoo – a collection of small ornamental objects. Amanda, the mother, is the type of female character recurring in Williams’s work: enveloped in idealizations in which a supposedly glorious past mingles with projections of an improbable redemptive future. Thus, Amanda remembers (or reinvents) her youth, when she received, with freshness and lightness, numerous suitors. At the same time, she dreams that her

daughter Laura will receive them and thus get married, guaranteeing a future for the family. However, an absent character – the father, who left the family, going on a trip throughout the USA a few years ago – gives a bitterness tone to the matriarch's youthful memories: as if the woman, as a girl, had missed the great opportunity of her life when choosing someone who would soon abandon everyone.

In this environment, young Tom Wingfield feels economically pressured: it is his work that maintains the family. Writing poems on the lids of the shoe boxes in the warehouse of the store where he works, the son hopes one day to become a poet. As compensation for the oppressive life he feels he leads, working in the warehouse and supporting his family, Tom has an escape in the cinema. Every night, the young man watches movies, returning only at dawn and always drunk – reasons that generate recurring disagreements with Amanda. The mother questions him, inducing scenarios of great decay or promiscuity by suggesting that he actually go to bars, not movie theaters:

AMANDA: I think you've been doing things that you're ashamed of. That's why you act like this. I don't believe that you go every night to the movies. Nobody goes to the movies night after night. [...]

[...]

AMANDA: Where are you going?

TOM: I'm going to the movies!

AMANDA: I don't believe that lie!

TOM (crouching toward her, overtowering her tiny figure. She backs away, gasping): I'm going to opium dens! Yes, opium dens, dens of vice and criminals' hang-outs, Mother. (WILLIAMS, 2014, p. 52-54)

At one point, several movie tickets fall out of the son's pockets, as definitive proof of the character's attendance at the *movie palaces*. From Tom's reports, it is shown that the space of the cinema was more than that of the feature film. The young Wingfield reports, for example, the showing of the news, series episodes, a decadent show of magic, and a showy fight between the locals. In fact, some movie palaces would not be familiar environments. And although there was a public boom starting in the 1940s, the frequency of movie theaters was reduced dramatically in the 1930s – the diegetic era of Tom's memory – with the intense economic crisis after 1929 (VALENTINE, 1996, p 90), which caused, when not the closing of movie theaters, investment in activities other than film projection, such as mini golf courses inside the building structure or the famous *dish nights*, in which kitchen dishes were drawn among the regulars, before or after the films were shown.

Through the behavior of Tom, who comes home early in the morning, intoxicated, and from the point of view of Amanda, who morally represses her son, I would like to propose that, as in the lobby of Joy Rio, a “third category cinema which was once a sumptuous opera house” (WILLIAMS, 2011, p. 71) in *These are the stairs you got to watch* (1941), Tennessee Williams draws a decadent and negative image of movie theaters of the period, an image linked to nocturnal addictions, which is opposed to day work, so exalted by Amanda, however hated by Tom. Unlike the aforementioned one-act play, which takes place in the cinema lobby, *The glass menagerie* has no action in this space, but cinema is constantly resumed in the words and attitudes of Tom Wingfield. During the visit of the friend and potential suitor of the sister (the possible redeemer of the family) Jim O'Connor, Tom reveals a secret plan: to leave for distant adventures. Adventures like those seen in the movies:

TOM: I'm tired of the movies.

JIM: Movies!

TOM: Yes, movies! Look at them! (*A wave toward the marvels of Grand Avenue*). All of those glamorous people, having adventures, hogging it all, gobbling the whole thing up! You know what happens? People go to the movies instead of moving! Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them! Yes, until there's a war. That's when adventure becomes available to the masses! Everyone's dish, not only Gable's! Then the people in the dark room come out of the dark room to have some adventure themselves. Goody, goody! It's our turn now, to go to the South Sea Islands, to make a safari, to be exotic, far-off! But I'm not patient. I don't want to wait till then. I'm tired of the movies and I am about to move!¹³ (WILLIAMS, 2014, p. 95-96)

At the end of the play, like his father, Tom leaves the family. With the money destined to pay the electricity bill, Tom enrolls in the merchant navy. And it is as a sailor, in the future, that Tom tells us the story of those days of crisis in the 1930s that preceded his departure. Cinema plays an important role in the dramatic outcome of Tom's character in *The glass menagerie*: it is where the character creates illusions of adventure while realizing that he does not live them. Tom is aware of a certain alienation that adventure movies¹⁴ provide, which, however, does not ensure

¹³ Here, we can observe a kind of pun made with the words *movies* and *move*.

¹⁴ The adventure film in the 1930s is related to the adaptations of medieval novels, such as those of swordsmen – *Zorro*, *The three musketeers*, etc. – with exciting storylines usually inserted in exotic settings from distant places. There is a hero, almost always male, who receives some type of call and sets out to save

that he does not *want* such adventures. The awareness of the alienating nature of Hollywood films¹⁵ is demarcated, no wonder, by the constant relationship with *illusionism* evoked by the narrator, as well as the relationship between cinema and opium, in addition to the direct comparison between the North American middle class and a *school for the blind*:

TOM: Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion. To begin with, I turn back time. I reverse it to that quaint period, the thirties, when the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind. Their eyes had failed them or they had failed their eyes, and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy. (WILLIAMS, 2014, p. 31)

No wonder that, right at the beginning of the play, Tom explicitly proposes a process of *anti-illusionism* (and talks, as we have seen, about the music, the light of the scene, etc.) while revealing his ability to return in time: he is explaining the epic procedure in a reflexive way. When Tom states that he will tell the truth through illusion, isn't he also questioning cinema, especially Hollywood, the factory of dreams and illusions par excellence? Instance of magic, which creates chimeras under the guise of truth? After all, it is after these *projections* that Tom sets out in search of a more exciting life and causes a tragic rupture in the family. The issue of illusionism is central to *The glass menagerie*, so that the figure of the magician is evoked more than once, as are the adventure films that, for Tom, would create the illusion of action in the paralyzed pre-war lives. When Tom, as a narrator and with an already distant and critical eye, refers to North America's blindness in the 1930s, a period before the USA accession to World War II in the 1940s, he repeatedly mentions war as the only possible adventure for the regular American *outside the movie theaters*. Tom, however, does not wait for this adventure, and anticipates it, but the war is always on the horizon and works in parallel with the paralysis pointed out by the protagonist-narrator in the difficult years of crisis.

something/someone, facing villains in distant lands. There are several subgenres for the adventure film, one of which is the pirate film. Judging by Tom's mention of the famous Jolly Roger – the pirate skull flag – as well as his decision to become a sailor, the pirate film subgenre is the one that dialogs best with his desires.

¹⁵ There is a poem by Bertold Brecht that addresses the question: "Hollywood: Every morning, to earn my bread / I go to the market where lies are bought./ Hopefully / I take up my place among the sellers" (PEIXOTO, 1979, p. 298).

The glass menagerie addresses the fragility of illusions. All the characters in the play live in particular illusions: the mother for the supposedly glorious past of the South of the USA, for a youth full of suitors, and for the projections about her daughter Laura, who, in turn, lives in a world apart, composed of small glass animals. Tom has in the cinema, in the adventure film, and in drinking, during his nocturnal escapes, a relief from daily life that he would have with a drug: his cinematic habits are explicitly compared to those of an addict, especially in his mother Amanda's lines. Everything is plastically wrapped by Williams's suggestions of an atmosphere full of smoke, translucent curtains, and glass artifacts. The word "transparency" is frequently mentioned in the rubrics of the text scenario, which can have an interesting, and probably unforeseen, connection with the "transparency" cinema (XAVIER, 2005) and the great illusions. The only character outside the world of illusions and with his feet planted in a tangible real is the *gentleman caller*, co-worker and Laura's old passion at school, Jim O'Connor. With an entrepreneurial and active profile, although in the same unfortunate situation as Tom and with his school dreams frustrated, Jim rationally and in opposition to the protagonist's cinematic delusions, aims to invest – precisely – in television: "Because I believe in the future of television! [...] I wish to be ready to go up right along with it. Therefore I'm planning to get in on the ground floor" (WILLIAMS, 2014, p. 119). Contrary to cinema, television appears, in this conversation, as a viable means for investments and guarantee of a solid life in the future. Jim O'Connor, however, does not solve the Wingfields's cravings (does not ask for Laura's hand) and leaves this almost spectral family home for his solid, real existence, taking public speaking courses, planning investments in television, and with a bride less "strange" than Laura.

In addition to the listed elements, there is still a subtle relationship to be explored between the character Amanda and the cinematic melodrama, as if the character, while fantasizing about her possibly idyllic past, was in dialogue with a melodramatic imagery, even if at odds with the other characters on the scene. Amanda sells subscriptions to women's magazines over the phone. And, to convince potential customers, she appeals to the thrill of serial stories. At one point, Amanda compares the story of one of the magazines with the story of the serial *Gone with the wind*: "Oh, honey, it's something that you can't miss! You remember how *Gone with the wind* took everybody by storm? [...] Everybody *talked* as Scarlett O'Hara" (WILLIAMS, 2014, p. 49).

In fact, Amanda Wingfield *talks* like Scarlett O'Hara. Although Amanda is referring to the serial format of the work, *Gone with the wind* has become a staple

in the North American cinematographic melodrama, directed by Victor Fleming in 1939, with almost four hours of blatant technicolor, uninterrupted and melodious melodies, and exaggerated solutions to conflicts. The beginning of the film takes place in the context of disputes and visits by wedding suitors (the famous *gentlemen callers*) within the aristocracy of the South of the USA. The whole imaginary of an idyllic North American South, with gentlemen as noble lords and ladies as desirable maidens, is reproduced in the delirious imagination of Amanda, who, when remembering and reinventing her own youth, outlines a bond – and is confused – with the iconic Scarlett O'Hara, who, like Amanda Wingfield, vies for the attention of all the boys in the region. This point must still be further deepened, but I would like to propose that the speeches, attitudes, and projections of the matriarch relate to a melodramatic imagination¹⁶, with an explicit quote to the plot of *Gone with the wind*.

To the extent that Amanda's memories and dreams match melodrama and are doomed to a failure of the present and decadent life, we can infer the following equation: such as Amanda's gestures and speeches, the forms of melodrama also do not escape decadence; as Amanda's dreamed and remembered life did not "happen," the melodrama – in its mention within the play – is just an instance of delirium. Tennessee Williams, as John Gassner notes, dialogues directly with this genre. And this relationship can be applied to other characters of the author, especially the female ones. What should be pointed out, in the analyzed play, is that we do not have a direct adherence to melodramatic forms, but a critical perspective – and, in the extreme, ironic, due to the exaggeration of Amanda's gestures – to the melodramatic imagination, as well as to the magical world of cinema screens and, in particular, adventure films.

Final remarks

The glass menagerie is explicitly linked to cinema resources. This intermedial link puts drama in check in Williams's text, bringing epic-narrative aspects by the insertion of a projector with commentary on the scene, the use of flashback, cuts, and transitions between scenes. However, in terms of thematic content, there is an ambiguity regarding Hollywood adventure films, melodrama, and *movie palaces*. Cinema is, at the same time, a propeller of change in the plot and a degrading and alienating element, as explicit in Tom's discussions with his mother and in the protagonist's conscious monologues, which evoke the criticism of illusionism and the

¹⁶ Peter Brooks (1995, p. VII) proposes that, in addition to a specific genre, melodrama is a type of modern imaginative mode: "The melodramatic mode is an inescapable dimension of modern consciousness."

state of blindness and passivity of North American pre-World War II society. The idea that cinema is capable of alienating, deceiving, and depraving can be inferred from Tennessee Williams's text to the extent that it blurs the boundaries between cinema and addiction, blindness and the decadent immobility of the average North American citizen, and the "on the fringe of the real" state in which the three members of the Wingfield family live. Cinema is an element of innovation within the play (in relation to the rules of the drama), making it more epic and modern, at the same time that it is the object of criticism before the issues related to illusionism and alienation. It is still a contradiction that magnifies the work that the reflective content of *The glass menagerie* regarding North American cinema is framed by explicit elements of the cinematographic language – that is, the criticism applies to the forms to which the audience is being subjected.

Taking the "nightmare" that Williams went through with MGM, we can think that *The glass menagerie* reflects, to a certain extent, some disenchantment of the author with the film industry, which refused his first work for the screens. *The gentleman caller* screenplay, as well as the derived play, probably does not correspond to the hegemonic standards, at least to those sought by MGM in that historical period. However, the theatrical dramaturgy resulting from the rejected script would work for three successful Hollywood adaptations – *The glass menagerie* (1950), by Irving Rapper; *The glass menagerie* (1987), by Paul Newman; and the television movie *The glass menagerie* (1973), by Anthony Harvey –, in addition to influencing at least two non-American cinematographic works – the Indian *Akale* (2004), by Shyamaprasad, and the award-winning Iranian feature film *اینجا بدون من* (*Here without me*, Bahram Tavakoli, 2011). After the success of *The glass menagerie*, it will not be long before Williams establishes an intimate relationship with Broadway and Hollywood, so the question remains for future development: when definitively inserted in the industry, how and by what procedures the works of Tennessee Williams will continue to articulate the reflective and potentially critical bias regarding hegemonic culture and artistic languages? Thinking about the relationship between media can help to formulate this response.

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